

When police broke into the house, they found a gas pipe beneath the bedroom floorboards had been severed.

A huge hunt ensued for the girls' parents — a nurse and a textile weaver — who'd been last seen leaving the village on an early-morning bus.



The newspapers were full of horrifying scenarios. In the months before the Marshalls' deaths, for instance, their local paper, the Lancashire Evening Post, had warned of 'the destruction of civilisation by the hydrogen bomb' — a weapon, first tested by the Americans in 1952, which had far more power than the atom bomb

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By the late Fifties, the phrase 'the next war' was used with bleak certainty. And fears didn't melt away: by the Eighties, 70 per cent of young people polled thought nuclear war was 'inevitable'

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m+ EXCLUSIVE How Caroline Flack's mum's hunt for answers about night she died is exposing old wounds,

Elsie and Andrew Marshall were finally located a few days later by a holidaymaker in Blackpool. Their bodies were floating in the shallows by the North Pier, fully dressed

The hunt for them had been headline news for days. But why, everyone wanted to know, had a seemingly normal couple decided to murder their three children?

All became clear when the contents of Elsie's final letter to her parents were revealed.

'In view of all the things that are happening in the world and the talk of new wars which would mean the extermination of masses of people and especially children, we decided we couldn't allow this to happen to our children,' she'd written.

'No harm can reach them now as they lie forever peacefully together in bed. Andrew and I did this because we love each other and our children and would hate the very idea [that] our children would be left to have to face in the future what other children faced in the last war.'

The Marshalls had killed their precious daughters to save them from a fate they deemed even worse: a nuclear strike on Britain.

And they were by no means the only Britons convinced their families would soon be vapourised, hideously injured or sentenced to a lingering death from radiation sickness.

The newspapers were full of horrifying scenarios. In the months before the Marshalls' deaths, for instance, their local paper, the Lancashire Evening Post, had warned of 'the destruction of civilisation by the hydrogen bomb' — a weapon, first tested by the Americans in 1952, which had far more power than the atom bomb.

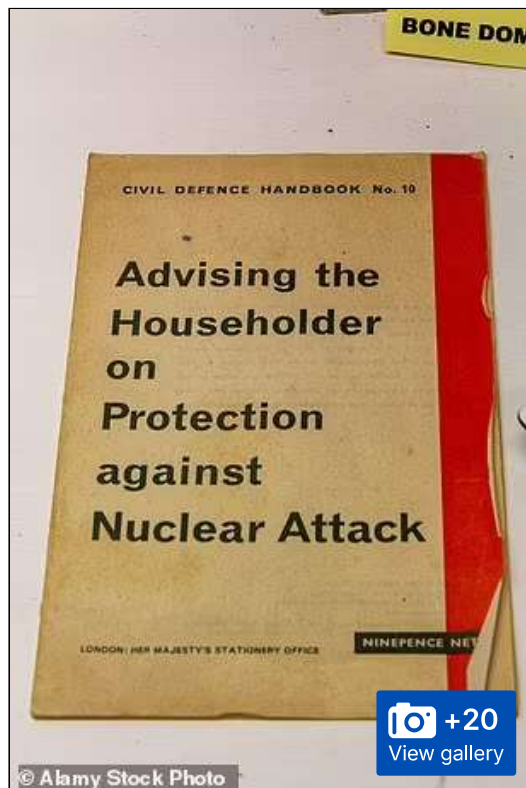
By the late Fifties, the phrase 'the next war' was used with bleak certainty. And fears didn't melt away: by the Eighties, 70 per cent of young people polled thought nuclear war was 'inevitable'.

Until relatively recently, a huge network of warning sirens — mounted on everything from schools to bell-towers — were poised to start wailing the moment a Soviet attack was imminent.

This was the infamous four-minute warning, during which the entire population would dive for cover.

Occasionally, the sirens were triggered by mistake. A false alarm in Devon, shortly after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, not only terrified people but left many suffering from shock. Some were physically sick.

Elsewhere, some were remarkably stoical, perhaps rationalising there was no point in panicking as they were all going to die anyway.



How does one plan for a nuclear holocaust, the collapse of civilisation and the possible extinction of the human race?

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Apocalypse now: Modelling anti-radiation suits in Lincolnshire and, above, a family in a Civil Defence trial to see how people would behave in a nuclear attack

'We're not easily frightened in Great Wakering,' one parish councillor declared. 'If it'd been the real thing, some of them here would have said a quick prayer but the others would just have had a pint at the pub.'

How does one plan for a nuclear holocaust, the collapse of civilisation and the possible extinction of the human race?

After the Soviet Union developed its own atom bomb in 1949, it seemed nowhere was safe — not a single street, forest, field or valley.

Those not killed instantly would be faced with vast firestorms and radioactive fallout that would poison not only people but crops and livestock, leading to catastrophic food shortages.

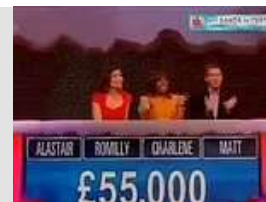
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needed was a revival of the good old Blitz spirit of World War II.

Civil defence groups were encouraged to hold meetings in village halls, iron their uniforms and carry out regular drills.

Just like in the days of the Blitz, they donned tin hats to practise in mocked-up bomb sites — lifting stretchers, bandaging arms and cheerfully bundling volunteers into waiting ambulances.

Whether there would have been any ambulances left, let alone ambulance drivers or roads, were not issues they were encouraged to contemplate.

Meanwhile, the ladies of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS), founded in 1938, focused on the welfare of nuclear holocaust survivors.

So they practised how to cook hundreds of emergency meals in a field kitchen and drew up well-meant plans to provide post-apocalyptic blankets, books, jigsaws and 'nice cups of tea'.

As late as 1981, the chairman of the WRVS — Lady Pike — spoke of their determination to continue their treasured 'meals on wheels' service after a nuclear attack.

'We intend to provide the same service we have always provided in peacetime,' she told the WRVS annual meeting.

'We shall provide rest homes for the injured, emergency clothing from our depots and emergency food to stranded people.'

It was all impossibly naïve, though the government was also trying to make more realistic plans.

Aware there'd be huge numbers of people needing emergency treatment for severe burns and other injuries, it decided to requisition nightclubs and hotels as supplementary hospitals.

atomic test



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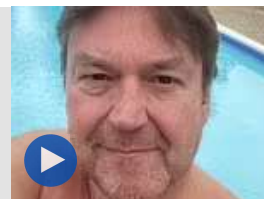
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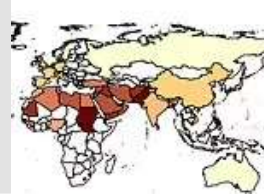
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As it contemplated Armageddon, the government decided what we really needed was a revival of the good old Blitz spirit of World War II. Civil defence groups were encouraged to hold meetings in village halls, iron their uniforms and carry out regular drills

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Just like in the days of the Blitz, they donned tin hats to practise in mocked-up bomb sites — lifting stretchers, bandaging arms and cheerfully bundling volunteers into waiting ambulances. Whether there would have been any ambulances left, let alone ambulance drivers or roads, were not issues they were encouraged to contemplate

It was assumed there'd be an initial period of growing international tension before the nukes were unleashed, during which such places could be transformed.

At the same time, most patients — including psychiatric cases — would be kicked out of existing hospitals in readiness for a deluge of casualties.

No one seemed to grasp there probably wouldn't be any functioning hospitals left, let alone any staff physically (or mentally) capable of returning to their posts.

Another knotty problem was what to do about prisoners. In the ghastly conditions after a nuclear strike, the government realised, a jail sentence would suddenly become highly desirable.

Not only would a prisoner be slightly safer behind a labyrinth of stout Victorian walls, but he'd theoretically have all his meals provided.

Far better, it was decided, to release nearly everyone short of rapists, murderers and other violent categories. This would free up hundreds of trained prison officers for war duties and allow prisons to be put to wartime use.

One of the most controversial proposals was what to do about offenders who'd been diagnosed as psychopaths. It came from the Home Office, which reckoned these people might be of unique value in the chaos of post-nuclear Britain.

A psychopath, noted an internal report, would experience 'no psychological effects in the communities which suffer the severest losses... They are very good in crises, as they have no feelings for others, no moral code, and tend to be very intelligent and logical.

single act caught on camera proved he did it

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exceptionally valuable resource.'



Meanwhile, the ladies of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS), founded in 1938, focused on the welfare of nuclear holocaust survivors. So they practised how to cook hundreds of emergency meals in a field kitchen and drew up well-meant plans to provide post-apocalyptic blankets, books, jigsaws and 'nice cups of tea'

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secret report on what the country could expect after a hydrogen bomb attack.



'We shall provide rest homes for the injured, emergency clothing from our depots and emergency food to stranded people.' It was all impossibly naïve, though the government was also trying to make more realistic plans

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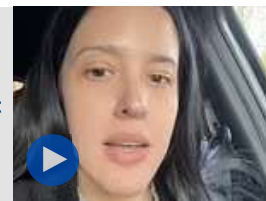
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Aware there'd be huge numbers of people needing emergency treatment for severe burns and other injuries, it decided to requisition nightclubs and hotels as supplementary hospitals

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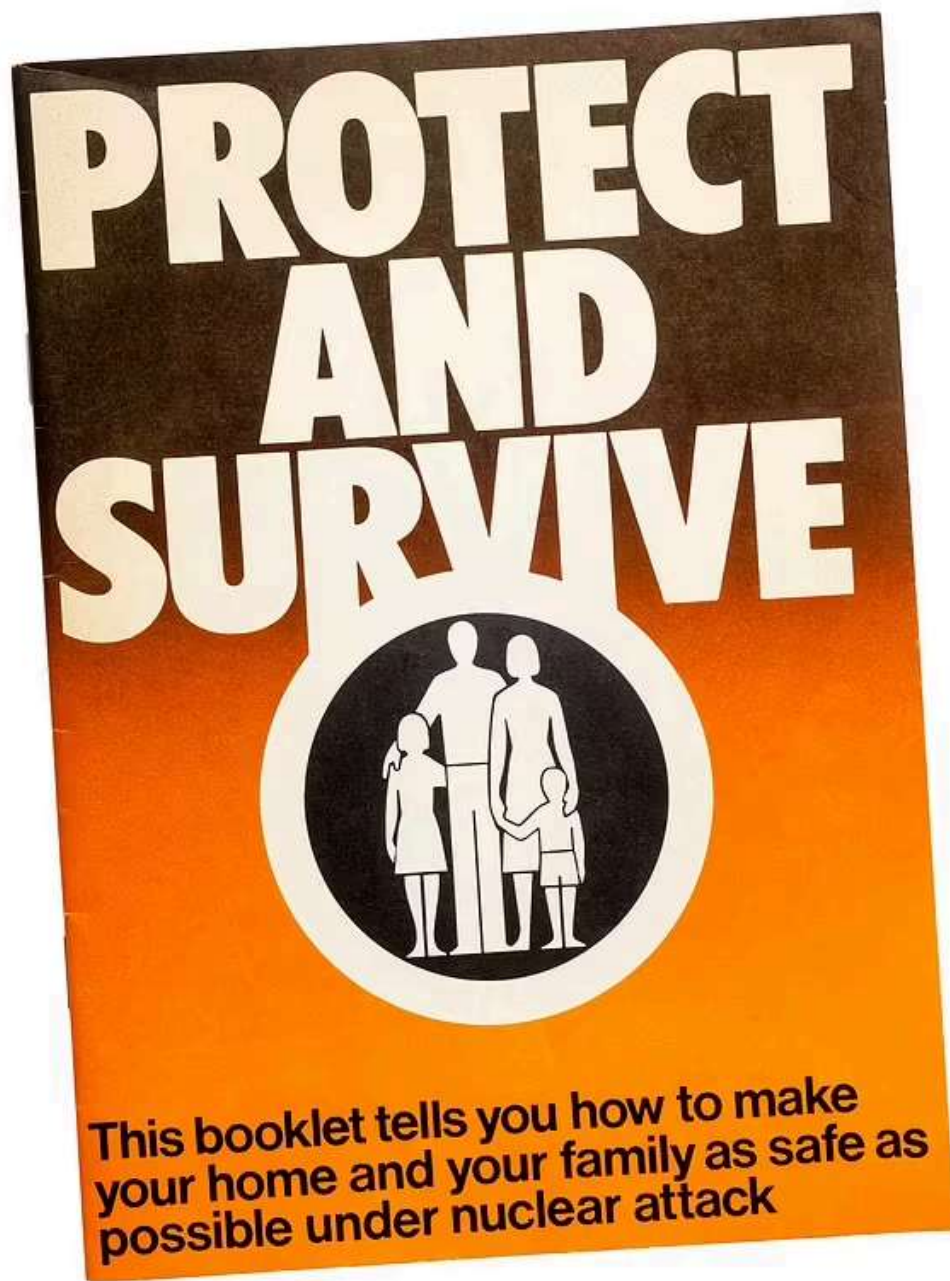
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It was assumed there'd be an initial period of growing international tension before the nukes were unleashed, during which such places could be transformed. At the same time, most patients — including psychiatric cases — would be kicked out of existing hospitals in readiness for a deluge of casualties

Delivered in 1955, it immediately put paid to any thoughts of evacuation. 'No part of the country would be free from the risk of radioactive contamination,' it said — and that included the billets where women and children had been sent for their safety.

The report therefore recommended that Britain should embark on a massive programme of shelter building. This was rejected, however, as too expensive.



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had poured down the escalators.

The Tube system in London? No good, the experts decided, because some stations had just two narrow spiral staircases and a lift that could take only six people at a time. The last thing anyone wanted was a crush as panicked people rushed for cover.

So no shelters for the British public, unless they happened to be part of the privileged group attempting to run the post-nuclear remains of the country.

A former underground aircraft factory in Wiltshire was kitted out for 4,000 selected politicians, scientists, analysts, strategists, clerical staff, technicians, cooks and medics.

For several weeks after the bomb dropped, they'd be expected to remain in what became known as the Burlington bunker, which had 800 offices plus dormitories, a medical wing, a BBC studio and a canteen.

Nuclear war might well be blackening the limestone above, but here life would continue as normally as possible. Among the canteen equipment was a machine for making nicely-shaped butter pats.

Elsewhere in the country, RSGs — or regional seats of government — would be lodged in special bunkers or in reassuringly solid buildings, such as Durham prison.



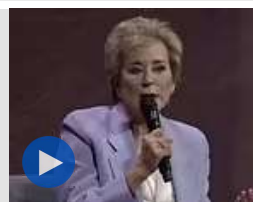
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Not only would a prisoner be slightly safer behind a labyrinth of stout Victorian walls, but he'd theoretically have all his meals provided. Far better, it was decided, to release nearly everyone short of rapists, murderers and other violent categories. This would free up hundreds of trained prison officers for war duties and allow prisons to be put to wartime use

Unfortunately, activists in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament managed to discover their locations, and released all the RSG addresses and phone numbers.

This meant the Soviets would know precisely where to aim their bombs. In one fell swoop, the RSGs were all rendered useless.

As the years went by, the issue of building fall-out shelters for the public was often debated privately in Whitehall, but nothing ever came of it.

The cost grew ever more eye-watering: £70billion, according to the Home Office in 1980, out of a total spending budget of £100 billion.

It was therefore hardly surprising that many people, or at least those with big enough gardens and bank balances, decided to build their own.

As always, America was ahead of us, with a thriving shelter business from the late Fifties onward. Aside from doubts about whether the shelters would really protect anyone, a new problem arose: the question of shelter morality.

Suppose the shelter was under your back lawn, with space and supplies for only

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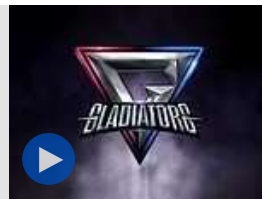
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A realistic training exercise called "Operation Camberwell" goes ahead in scenes reminiscent of the "Blitz" as Civil Defence personnel rescue a "casualty" in a realistic attempt to show how the authorities would cope in any A-bomb attack

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as he reveals she 'HATED' him when they first met



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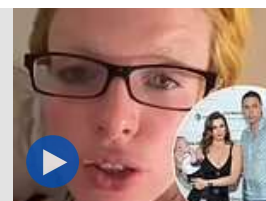
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Two instructors demonstrate protective clothing, designed for civil rescue work after nuclear, biological or gas warfare, at the Home Office Civil Defence Technical Training School at Essingwold, Yorkshire

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And now? If we don't hear much about preparations for nuclear war, it's because the Iron Curtain fell and the Soviet Union broke apart. The immediate nuclear threat subsided

After squeezing into your makeshift shelter, possibly with friends or family, you had to remain there for at least 48 hours, switching on your battery-driven transistor radio every hour for government announcements.

Only after two weeks might it be safe-ish to leave the house.

This was all very well, but it wasn't as if most people had planks, bricks and sandbags lying about. Someone calculated that the sandbagging of Hull alone would exhaust the entire national supply of sand.

And now? If we don't hear much about preparations for nuclear war, it's because the Iron Curtain fell and the Soviet Union broke apart. The immediate nuclear threat subsided.

The sirens that would have sounded the alert became rusty relics. In 1993, the Home Office complained it would cost £38 million to refurbish them and ordered them to be scrapped. A few were left in place to be used for flood warnings.

A handful of others remain — including one perched on a vandalised railway bridge outside Waterloo, presumably still waiting to be ticked off some crinkled council to-do list.

"We were told to make a shelter out of doors, blankets and string"

Other countries haven't been so hasty. In March 2022, the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, echoed to the wail of sirens. Germany tested its own just three years ago — the first time the sirens had sounded since the Cold War.

Regular tests are also carried out on siren networks in many other European countries.

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Celebrity Big Brother's Mickey Rourke takes a brutal swipe at TOWIE's Ella Rae Wise after she confesses she wants to be 'beautiful forever'



▶ Tyla, 23, leaves VERY little to the imagination in skimpy gold hot pants and ripped fishnet tights as she performs at Coachella



▶ Beckhams 'blank Brooklyn' on his wedding anniversary as he celebrates third year with Nicola Peltz



▶ Irish rap group Kneecap spur on Coachella crowd singing vile anti-Margaret Thatcher song moments before being censored



▶ Katherine Ryan 'takes savage swipes at everyone from disgraced rapper P Diddy to Maura Higgins and 'very stupid' Tommy Fury in her latest stand up show'



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If the unimaginable happened? We'd have to resort to battery or wind-up radios. As few people have one, there'd be a run on the shops and they'd sell out.

One hopes the government is drawing lessons from the past. Granted, we got a lot wrong during the Cold War, but we also got some things right.

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M **maurice**, leighton buzzard, United Kingdom, 2 years ago

my Dad was a fireman and had nuke training in the 60s during the Cuban missile crisis . He said that in the event of a bomb detonating the area radiating out from the centre would be divided into zones , Anyone trying to move out from any zone to

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► Lauren Sanchez reveals what she is keeping under seat as she goes into space on all-female mission


► Emmerdale legend announces they are expecting their third child as co-stars and famous friends rush to congratulate

► AJ Odudu ditches her signature racy outfit for a muted black suit for latest Celebrity Big Brother and fans are convinced they know why

► Big Brother fans left fuming as Michael Fabricant becomes first star evicted over controversial Mickey Rourke and 'boring' Jack P. Shepherd




about former conservatorship



▶ Georgia Steel flaunts her jaw-dropping figure in skimpy red underwear set as she strips down for sexy lingerie shoot



▶ Teddi Mellencamp reveals chilling symptoms that led to brain tumor discovery



▶ Ralph Fiennes reveals why he went fully NAKED for new film The Return and lifts lid on extreme measures he took to get in shape for the role



▶ Khloe Kardashian's celebrity crush says he WOULD sleep with her... but there's a problem



▶ William and Kate share never before seen family picture to mark national day



▶ Mickey Rourke's 'look of pain in his eyes is a non-verbal sign of his childhood trauma', says body language expert



▶ Gemma Collins stuns commuters as she shows off her impressive piano skills with an impromptu performance at London's Liverpool Street Station



▶ Australia's Next Top Model star tragically dies aged 27 as Donatella Versace leads tributes



▶ Celebrity Big Brother SPOILER: The housemates play a trick on Mickey Rourke ahead of the first live eviction



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